

# Collaborative Group Work

Definition Collaborative group work involves bringing students or staff members together in small groups for the common purpose of engaging in learning. Effective group work is well planned and strategic. Students or staff members are grouped intentionally with each individual held accountable for contributing to the group activity. Each activity is designed so that participants with diverse skill and knowledge levels are supported as well as challenged by their peers.

## Advantages

- Allows participants to practice using language specific to content and topic areas
- Provides specific time to share and listen to new ideas
- Offers an opportunity to try out new language, process information, and get feedback
- Allows teacher/leader – student and peer-peer interaction
- Teacher or leader is an active facilitator

## Actually, it ...

- Should be a meaningful and purposeful part of planning
- Can vary according to participant needs
- Can be used across all content areas, grade levels, and adult groups
- Should be rigorous, with purposeful learning, and relevant
- Must be more than the arrangement of furniture in a room
- Can be used to access both individual and group knowledge
- Gives participants opportunities to find their voices and engage their peers

## Academic Benefits of Group Work

- Increased engagement with learning
- Deeper, more flexible understanding
- Differentiated support for individuals
- Tool for assessment

## Culture-Building Aspects of Group Work

- Group-generated solutions
- Culture of mutual responsibility
- Behavioral norms
- Comfort with taking risk

## How It Works in Any Classroom

- Teach students how to work in groups
- Form groups carefully, according to the demands of each assignment
- Set clear expectations...with enough structure
- Hold students accountable for their work
- Differentiate assignments and support
- Use group work as a formative assessment tool
- Find comfort in the noise
- Change course when necessary (*and be patient with less-than-total success*)

## Getting Started...

- Give explicit instructions about group work requirements
- Set ground rules for working in groups
- Use data to plan both group configuration and learning objectives
- Debrief group work process and products
- Use protocols to set up group work roles and procedures

## Examples of Collaborative Group Work

1. **Introductory – Focused Discussion:** Participants assigned to pairs or triads. Each group is given 4 minutes to answer a question that relates to the topic for the upcoming activity or unit. Group needs to reach a consensus on the answer to the question.
2. **Turn-to-Your-Partner Discussions:** Can be used in a variety of ways – after a 10 minute lecture, students can answer a question with a partner; partners can describe a different ending or way to get the answer, etc.
3. **Fishbowl:** Teams of three or four work on a problem or exercise. At the same time, other teams of three or four observe the first teams. In particular, the first teams work on seeking other points-of-view, listening to and

paraphrasing ideas, and other communication skills while solving the given problem. The second teams focus their attention on the team dynamic and make sure they are prepared to discuss how well or poorly the first teams worked together to solve the problem. *(There is sometimes the tendency of the second teams to focus on the problem rather than the team dynamic.)* After a set time (even if every team has not finished the problem), the large group discusses what happened and what didn't happen during the activity.

4. **Pairs Check:** Teams of four work in pairs on a set of exercises. First one member works on a problem, while the second member coaches. Then the second member works on a problem while the first coaches. Pairs then check their answers with members of the same team. After all problems, inconsistencies, etc. are resolved; the process is repeated for subsequent exercises.
5. **Teams Check:** Teammates help each other understand answers to exercises, so that any member of the team may be called upon to answer any one of the questions.
6. **Jigsaw:** If there is reading material (such as background) to be digested before doing an activity, split it up into 3 or 4 self-contained parts. Divide the class into the same number of Reading Groups. Give one part of the reading to each team to digest and to prepare to explain to their team. Then rearrange the students so that each team has someone who has read one of the self-contained parts, and have each student teach his/her part of the reading to the rest of the team.
7. **Think-Pair-Share:** Students think about each question, pair off and discuss the question with a classmate, and share their answers with the class.
8. **Think-Pair-Square:** This is the same as Think-Pair-Share, except that students share their answers with members of another pair.
9. **Word Webbing:** As a team or individually, open-ended or with concepts provided by the teacher, students construct a concept map within a specified domain. If done in teams, each member should have a different color of pen.

### Uses with Technology

- Wikis
- Discussion Boards
- Collaborative White Boards
- Group Projects using Technology
- Titan Pad
- Google products
- QR codes
- Working in groups with cell phones
- Mind maps
- Prezi

### Sample Roles for Collaborative Groups

1. **Manager/Leader:** to keep the team on task
2. **Reader:** to read aloud the question being answered by the team
3. **Encourager:** to make sure everyone participates
4. **Checker:** to make sure everyone understands
5. **Writer/Recorder:** to record results and to make sure everyone agrees
6. **Artist:** if needed to prepare the presentation
7. **Presenter:** if needed to explain the team's answer to the rest of the class
8. **Roving Reporter:** when the team gets stuck, allowed to roam the room looking for ideas and brings them back
9. **Time Keeper:** encourages group to stay on task; announces when time is halfway through and when time is nearly up
10. **Errand Monitor:** collects supplies or request help from teacher when necessary

### Hints

1. Determine how many per group
2. Decide team make-up – heterogeneous, homogeneous; male, female or mixed
3. Give everyone an active role